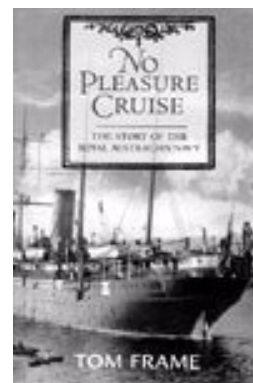


No Pleasure Cruise: The Story of the Royal Australian Navy

Tom Frame

Reviewed by Dr Sam Bateman



In his preface, Tom Frame admits that when he joined the RAN in 1979 as a 16-year-old cadet midshipman, he knew practically nothing about Australian naval history. Since then he has gone on to become a well known naval historian having written fifteen books, including the seminal works *Where Fate Calls: The HMAS Voyager Tragedy* and *HMAS Sydney: Loss and Controversy*. With *No Pleasure Cruise*, he now provides a straightforward account of the RAN's origins and history. It is a worthwhile read for anyone joining the RAN with that same lack of knowledge of naval history that Tom Frame had when he joined the navy.

Although its sub-title is *The Story of the Royal Australian Navy*, the first seventy pages of *No Pleasure Cruise* are devoted to the colonial period. There are then 100 pages on the formation of the RAN post-Federation and the two World Wars before 130-odd pages on the period since 1945. The RAN's involvement in the Vietnam War is covered extensively but the Malaysian Emergency, Far East Strategic Reserve (FESR), and Confrontation rather less so. There is no reference to the role of the RAN in establishing the Royal Malaysian Navy (RMN), or of the RAN personnel who served in RMN vessels during Confrontation and were in the thick of the clashes with Indonesian infiltrators in the Malacca and Singapore Straits.

The chapter on the Vietnam period 1965–72 is entitled 'Up Top' although this expression owes its origins to the earlier periods of the South-East Asian Treaty Organisation (SEATO) and the FESR in the 1950s and earlier 1960s. To that extent, *No Pleasure Cruise* does not adequately capture the impact of South-East Asian deployments on the RAN prior to the Vietnam involvement.

Quite a lot of attention is given to the collisions of HMAS *Melbourne* with HMAS *Voyager* and USS *Frank E. Evans* but with no new insights. Some day someone will produce a book contrasting these collisions in a way that might throw some light on the relative culpability of the ships involved rather than just damning the two destroyers and their captains. Frame observes that Captain Stevenson did "everything that Captain Robertson, *Melbourne's* commanding officer when she collided with *Voyager* was criticised for not doing". Nevertheless, Captain Stevenson did commit the fatal error of turning to port in an extremis situation and that may well be part of the reason why the Americans found him at fault.

The recent history of the RAN, including the two Gulf Wars, East Timor and Operation Relex receive considerable attention in *No Pleasure Cruise*. We have some controversy here with Frame claiming that some ministers (by implication, John Moore for one) 'did not just perform poorly' but also 'left a legacy of ill-will and distrust'. He then claims that the 'children overboard' affair was 'a low point in the navy's relationship with the Australian people' and that 'blame can properly be laid at the feet of both the Coalition partners and the ADF's senior leadership'. In his comments on ministerial performance, he rightly (in the opinion of this reviewer) identifies John Gorton and Kim Beazley as probably the only two ministers who have made much of a contribution to the size and shape of the RAN since the Second World War.

At the risk of nit-picking, the book has some minor errors. A photograph on page 204 purports to show three RAN carriers at sea but this cannot be correct as the three carriers (*Melbourne*, *Sydney* and *Vengeance*) were never at sea together—*Vengeance* having left for the United Kingdom in 1955 and *Melbourne* not arriving in Australian waters until 1956. There was no Kookaburra class of boom defence vessel—the later boom defence vessels were Bar-class while the *Kookaburra* herself was a Net-class. HMNZS *Blackpool* was a frigate not a cruiser and HMS *Cleopatra* was also a frigate never a destroyer. There were 22 Pacific patrol boats delivered to Pacific island countries between 1987 and 1997—not twenty as stated.

Tom Frame admits in his preface that much of the material in this book is not new. It is also very difficult to assess the quality and quantity of his research. Although there are frequent and lengthy quotations, there is not one footnote or endnote providing details of their source. This may not faze the general reader but it does subtract substantially from the historical value of the work.

No Pleasure Cruise will be good reading for anyone who, like Tom Frame when he joined the RAN, knows little about Australian naval history. However, the more informed reader might find it disappointing. ♦

Tom Frame, *No Pleasure Cruise: The Story of the Royal Australian Navy*, Allen & Unwin, Crows Nest NSW, 2004, paperback, 336 pp., RRP \$35.00.